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Central Intelligence Agency

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Pakistan: Perceptions of Relations with the US

US-Pakistani relations have improved since 1980, but these gains are fragile. The two nations' Afghanistan policies and caution regarding Soviet aims in South Asia are convergent interests.

US arms

embargoes in 1965 and 1971 plus the temporary suspension of economic aid in 1979 have convinced most Pakistanis that Washington is an unreliable ally.

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Pakistani officials in general are receptive to expanding contacts with the US.

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-- Few Pakistani officials believe, however, that the US would support Pakistan if it were attacked by India, and there are doubts about US willingness--and capability--to come to Pakistan's assistance in the event of a Soviet attack.

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-- [redacted] the sale of advanced weapons is the yardstick by which Islamabad measures US support. The F-16s are especially welcome and are a crucial symbol of the US commitment to Pakistan.

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Popular perceptions of the US are more ambiguous

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-- US military and economic assistance is widely publicized and appears to have made a positive impact. However, most Pakistanis reject US Middle East policy, which they charge

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is biased in favor of Israel. Many are suspicious that the US remains hostile to Tehran because it cannot tolerate a "truly Islamic government" and believe Pakistan would be subject to similar pressure should it follow Iran's example.

- Many Pakistanis, including those with ties to the military and the bureaucratic elite, condemn US policy on nuclear nonproliferation as applied to Pakistan. They assert it is intended to prevent the development of domestic nuclear power facilities and to retard Pakistan's ability to achieve economic independence. They reject as hypocritical US claims it is attempting to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and point to Washington's willingness to continue assistance to India, which has exploded a nuclear device.
- Zia's political opponents are attempting to exploit US military and economic assistance to portray the President as a US puppet. Politicians on the left and center repeatedly assert that Zia could not survive without US support. Scattered anti-American incidents occurred during recent anti-regime demonstrations in Sind Province.

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